

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

WILSON'S STORM PETREL *OCEANITES OCEANICUS* IN KENYA On 6 April 1980, some 3 km off Malindi, I watched a Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanicus* through x10 binoculars for at least 2 min. When disturbed by the boat at about 20 m range, it was immediately recognizable as one of the small, dark-bodied, white-rumped storm petrels. The tail was virtually square (appearing very slightly cleft in the centre), the wings were all-dark below and only slightly angled at the carpal joint, and the legs were long, projecting beyond the tail. Most texts stress that the webs of the feet of this species are yellow. The webs of this bird were apparently dark, as was the case with several individuals I observed in the South Atlantic in January 1968. In fact, the photographs and text of Boswall (1979) show that web colour is seldom a useful field character. Long legs, projecting beyond the tail, combined with other features such as tail shape and wing shape, allow Wilson's Storm Petrel to be identified with certainty if a reasonable view is obtained. In contrast, a bird which I saw off Watamu on 23 April 1978, most probably Leach's Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* (E.A. Bird Report 1978), had a slightly forked tail, markedly angled wings, and legs short (apparently concealed beneath the tail).

Britton (1980) refrained from admitting Wilson's Storm Petrel to the East African avifauna, despite the likelihood that most of the small storm petrels seen annually in our waters are this species (rather than Leach's Storm Petrel, for which there is, however, one specimen record from Kenya). These earlier sightings, often involving several individuals on several dates, were made by fishing enthusiasts without the benefit of binoculars or a knowledge of critical field characters.

Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957), Penny (1974) and others have considered it likely that the Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* occurs off the coasts of eastern Africa. White (1965), on the other hand, noted that, although the species is common off the Cape Province of South Africa during November to May, there is no proper record of the Storm Petrel from the Indian Ocean or the Red Sea. In response to Penny's comments, Feare & Bourne (1978) have established that there is no specimen of the Storm Petrel north of its accepted winter quarters off South Africa, whereas a large series of the superficially similar Wilson's Storm Petrel has now been collected all round the Indian Ocean.

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